

South Thames Colleges Group

STCG ADMISSIONS POLICY & PROCEDURE

1. Policy Remit

This policy covers all Further Education courses including Full Time, Part Time, Full Cost Recovery and Apprenticeships (for Higher Education please see separate policy).

2. Admissions Mission Statement

The South Thames Colleges Group (STCG) seeks to ensure a fair admissions system which provides equal opportunities for all individuals, irrespective of their race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religious or philosophical belief, age, marital or parental status or socio-economic class to gain admission to the courses suited to their ability and aspirations.

Our approach to admission of students will be:

- Transparent
- Fair
- Consistent
- Personalised
- Timely

3. Admissions Criteria

Admission criteria for each course are published on the respective College website and staff will use these in determining the suitability of the course for the applicant.

The College takes into account all qualifications taken before enrolment, including GCSEs taken at Key Stage Four and other relevant qualifications. We also seek to accredit prior learning.

Admissions process and criteria for the Aurora Centre are published on the Merton College website.

Some courses, including many in adult education offered on behalf of Merton and Wandsworth Local Authorities do not have entry criteria.

3.1 Information, Advice and Guidance

All potential learners have the right to expect free, independent and accurate information from the College about all available programmes and routes to their chosen career. The College will provide information on:

- teaching and learning facilities including learning resource centres, workshops, information technology and other resources
- courses offered and the qualifications they lead to
- entry grades or other entry criteria
- how the course is organised
- indicative times and days on which the course takes place and where it is held

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- teaching and assessment requirements
- support available for learners with disabilities, learning difficulties and/or medical conditions
- indicative arrangements for work experience, if appropriate
- approximate costs of studying and the financial help available, including learning loans, bursaries and help with childcare costs.
- the services available for learners who are subject to international fees

3.2 Applications and Interviews

All applicants for full time and substantial part-time programmes and courses will be required to complete an application form and will be interviewed to ensure that the course for which they have applied will meet their learning needs and progression goals. Where an applicant is unsure about which programme to apply for they will be invited for a careers information and advice interview

3.3 Applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome of the interview including details of any conditions for entry to the course either at the end of the interview or within ten working days

3.4 Admission to the Aurora Centre is determined on a case-by-case basis using multiple sources of information. Please see Merton Collegewebsite for further information

3.5 For short part-time courses, an application form and interview will not normally be required. If an applicant needs to be interviewed prior to acceptance on a course this will be made clear in all the Group’s promotional literature and on each College’s website. If applicable, each College’s prospectus and website will have the following information on short part-time courses:

- enrolment instructions
- fees and fee reduction arrangements (if applicable)
- payment via instalments
- refund policy

3.6 Learning Support

STCG aims to support and meet the needs of all students. In order to do this applicants should declare if they have a learning difficulty/disability or medical need. We expect all declarations to be supported in writing and with independent documentation where required.

Applicants will be required to attend a support assessment/interview before their curriculum interview to ensure that appropriate support can be planned and put in place as required. Please refer to the Admissions and Support Interview Process.

N.B. For some applicants, the college may not be able to make the reasonable adjustments required in order to support the individual accordingly and / or the applicant may pose a significant risk to the other students and or staff; in such instances, the College reserves the right not to admit.

If the College is unaware of applicant’s needs at the point of enrolment the College may be unable to make reasonable adjustment to support at a later stage in the course and reserves the right then to withdraw the learner accordingly.

In order to assist our students in being successful on the chosen course applicants may be required to complete a learning needs assessment prior to interview. This can be completed either from home or at the interview.

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Consultations from the local authorities for the placement of applicants with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) must be made by the 31st March in the year prior to admission. Consultations after this date will only be considered in exceptional circumstances to enable the College adequate time to plan transition arrangements and staffing.

Applicants who provide an EHCP during/ after the enrolment period i.e. the local authority has not consulted the College, will require an assessment. In cases where the assessment indicates an applicant's needs cannot be met, or the local authority does not agree a package of support funding the College considers necessary to meet these needs the College reserves the right to withdraw any offer of a place, or withdraw the student should they have been enrolled.

4. Admissions Criteria

The Level and specific demands of an individual course will determine the entry requirements, as noted above the College also operates a policy of the accreditation of prior learning.

Applications will be assessed and places offered on the following criteria, where applicable:

- Proof of all academic achievement or predicted achievement (GCSEs in particular)
- Completion of BKSB diagnostic tests in English and Mathematics and any other diagnostic tests, as required
- Personal statements – to understand skills, motivation and interest in subject
- Successful Previous (Last) Institution Reference.
- Successful Interview/audition which demonstrate clear suitability for the chosen course and college environment
- Satisfactory Portfolios/Project
- Practical Assessment
- Review of any supporting documentation regarding learner needs, including most recent EHCP / Review
- Agreement to undertake a Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS)
- Agreement to abide by the rules and regulations of the College and to accept the College's support services

The College reserves the right to operate a holistic assessment of the suitability of the student for a particular course. For example, in rare cases where an individual has fallen just short of an aspect of the published entry criteria, admissions tutors may choose to exercise professional judgment in skills assessment. This may involve asking the applicant to undertake further tasks to demonstrate capability. Any such variation to entry qualifications will be signed off by a relevant Manager.

References are deemed satisfactory on the following criteria:

- Academic performance as evidenced by progress reports and estimated grades that are relevant to the course(s) being applied for
- Attendance and Punctuality
- Behaviour

The College always requires proof of qualifications at enrolment and will not enroll applicants who are unable to prove the qualifications they claim to have.

Entry requirements are reviewed annually and published on the College's website.

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If it is not possible to obtain a reference for a student due to a holiday period etc., the College may consider accepting information presented in a recent school report.

5. International Applicants

STCG welcomes students with international qualifications. International qualifications will be assessed in order to establish the equivalent British qualification level.

Tier 4 visa applicants should note that we only sponsor students who are studying full time courses at Kingston College, based in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. These include the following sites: Kingston Hall Road, Creative Industries Centre, and Drapers Court.

All enquiries for Tier 4 students should be directed to admissions@kingston-college.ac.uk

6. Recognition of Prior Learning

- 6.1** Admission to courses /programmes with and without advanced standing is possible using the recognition of prior learning. A number of assessment processes allow achievement from a range of activities, using any valid assessment method, to be recognized. These include Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA). Applicants applying via the accreditation of prior experiential learning should make this clear on the application form and discuss this with the interviewer who will review the request and evidence provided in line with the published guideline and any awarding body regulations.

The accreditation of prior learning is not guaranteed, and applicants should be aware that where qualifications have changed to new specifications the older specification may not be acceptable as evidence; and where qualifications have a similar title it does not mean that their content is always the same.

7. Interview Process

Upon receipt of an application the College will acknowledge receipt (within 5 working days). Notification of the interview date will be sent within 10 working days.

The invitation to interview will require applicants to attend at a specified time. If an applicant is unable to attend and have not let the College know, a letter will be sent requesting them to reschedule the interview.

Applicants on Full Time, 16-18 courses may be asked to bring a school reference or their latest school report to their interview.

At interview prospective students may be requested to bring their progress file and anything else listed in the interview letter (e.g. art portfolio, reference from child care work experience, etc.).

Applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome of the interview including details of any conditions for entry to the course either at the end of the interview or within ten working days.

If the College is unable to offer a place, the applicant will be offered the opportunity to discuss alternative options with a member of the Information, Advice and Guidance Team.

The offer of a place does not guarantee that the course or programme will run. Should a course or programme (or part thereof) be cancelled, the applicant will be offered an alternative course or programme if appropriate, or advice and guidance on alternative provision.

8. Unsuccessful Applicants

The College reserves the right to refuse admission to potential students on the following grounds:

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- Is unable or unlikely to meet any required entry requirements
- Has needs which cannot be met by reasonable adjustment by the College
- Local authorities (LA) are responsible for ensuring that they consult with STCG on the placement of learners with an EHCP, by the 31st March prior to admission. If the LA has not consulted by this date, the College reserves the right not to proceed with the applicant's enrolment. Where an applicant has been assessed as requiring a high needs support package, the full support package must be agreed by the LA in writing to the College, prior to the start of the academic year.
- If the College is in receipt of an unsatisfactory reference from the applicant's previous educational institution, which it considers to be unsatisfactory
- Has a history of high risk behaviour which poses a threat to the health and safety of themselves, other learners or staff
- Has previously been excluded from any of the Colleges in the Group or another education institution
- Has previously attended any of the Colleges in the group, or another education establishment, and not completed courses, including all external assessments, without good reason
- Has previously been subject to the STCG disciplinary procedure and has not followed the recommendations following the outcome of any such disciplinary
- If the applicant is unable to demonstrate sufficient interest or motivation to study on the chosen programme
- Has outstanding debts with the any of the Colleges in the group
- Provides false or misleading information on an application or enrolment form
- If an applicant has an unspent criminal conviction and the College, following a risk assessment and in its reasonable opinion, considers that the applicant will compromise the STCG duty of care to staff and students. Please see associated Unspent Criminal Conviction process and procedure
- If an applicant will compromise the College's duty of care to staff and students as assessed through the College's Risk Assessment procedure

Misconduct, by an applicant or anyone accompanying them, at any stage of the Admissions process
The above list is indicative, and is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. The College reserves the right to make the final decision on whether or not to accept an application or enrolment to College or to the Group.

In the event the College offers a place and subsequently discovers that the candidate has committed an action that would constitute gross misconduct under the College's Disciplinary Procedure, the College reserves the right to withdraw the offer, whether or not the course or programme has commenced.

The College may request a DBS check for applicants to certain programmes. Where a DBS decision is requested, the outcome of this will be taken into consideration when making a decision about offering a place to an individual.

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9. Appeal

If the College is unable to offer you a place you may appeal to the College Principal, within 5 working days from the decision being communicated.

Applicants must explain the reasons why the College should reconsider its decision and include further evidence and any new mitigating circumstances which could influence the original decision.

Appeals will only be considered on the following grounds:

- (a) That there is new evidence that was not earlier considered and could have been expected to have materially affected the decision; (this does not include consideration of information that was available but not provided by the applicant)
- (b) The College did not adhere to its own policies and procedures when arriving at the original decision;

Appeals will be considered by the College Principal or their nominated Senior Manager, whose decision is final.

Applicants will be notified of the decision as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than 20 working days from receipt of the written notice of appeal.

10. Student/Parent / Guardian Communications

In order to comply with the General Data Protection Act students who turn 18 during the application process or during their course will be communicated to directly.

Exceptions to this rule (e.g. vulnerable adults) will apply and in such cases communication will parents will continue.

11. Closure of Courses

The College reserves the right to close courses which, in its judgement are not financially viable to run. In such cases the applicants will be offered information, advice and guidance on alternative suitable provision either within the Group or with alternative training providers.

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ANNEX TO: STCG ADMISSIONS POLICY & PROCEDURE

ACCREDITATION & RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY & PROCESS

Introduction

A number of assessment processes allow achievement from a range of activities, using any valid assessment method, to be recognised.

These include Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA). Provided that the assessment requirements of a given unit or qualification have been met, these processes can be used to accredit part of a unit(s) or a qualification. For the purposes of this document this will be referred to as RPL throughout.

Any learner hoping to accredit any prior learning should discuss with their interviewer who will review the procedures for the specific awarding body and confirm if the learner's prior evidence is suitable. Students should be aware that where qualifications have changed to new specifications the older specifications may not be accepted as evidence; and where qualifications have a similar title it does not mean that their content is always the same. For example: units from a Sport qualification may not be accepted on Sport and Exercise Science.

Scope of policy

Learners may be able apply Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to internally assessed parts of vocational qualifications.

The use of recognition of prior learning is optional. For example if the learner has completed a unit at another centre but achieved a grade lower than they were able, or the assessment was some time ago discretion can be used as to whether to accept their prior learning

Some awarding bodies do not allow the use of RPL for external assessment, set exams or set assignments.

What is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?

RPL is about using a learner's evidence of earlier learning and achievement towards part of a qualification. An assessor reviews whether the evidence is enough to show that a learner has met the assessment requirements for a current qualification. The learner needs to show that through knowledge, understanding or skills they already have, they do not need to repeat the course or complete extra assessment activity.

If there is evidence that the learner has previously shown the knowledge, skills or understanding required by a qualification, this may be used towards achieving that qualification.

The evidence must be:

- valid;
- current;
- reliable;
- authentic and
- sufficient.

RPL is not normally used to provide evidence against achievement for an entire qualification. This

would be called an exemption, and is usually used where a learner must gain a specified qualification for a particular purpose (for example, as an entry requirement for further study, employment or registration). If you or your learners think that they are entitled to an exemption, we recommend you refer to the organisation which has specified the original qualification requirement. If a particular qualification is specified as an entry requirement to a qualification offered by us, we will list any appropriate exemptions in our specification.

Can learners use a previously achieved certificate towards a qualification? 3

Some awarding bodies will map or give guidance to show shared content across units or qualifications (for example, First Aid Certificates). In these cases, a learner may use a previously achieved certificate as evidence without them having to repeat learning or assessment.

If the awarding body has not mapped the qualification, the course team will need to map and check that the learners' previous certificated achievement meets the current qualifications assessment criteria. It is important that you keep a record of the mapping so that the awarding body can confirm that it is valid.

No extra assessment is needed if a learner's previously achieved certificate or qualification meets the requirements of a whole unit.

Standard Process for RPL

Stage 1: Awareness, information and guidance

- Before enrolling the learner, the option of using RPL to claim units for some of their past learning or experience should be considered. This should normally occur during interviews by the subject teachers / lecturers where the learners previous education and experience will be discussed.
- If the teaching team believes that RPL is a suitable option for the learners they should discuss with their Head of Section / Curriculum Manager / Head of School. Advice from the Quality Nominee may also be required.
- The programme lead should check that the evidence provided by the learner for RPL has been achieved before the start of their course of study and discuss the process with the learner.

Stage 2: Pre assessment, gathering evidence and giving information

- Register your learner as soon as they officially start to gather evidence.
- To help the learner in gathering evidence you could create an assessment plan or tracking document.
- The evidence gathered needs to meet the standards of the unit, or part of a unit, that the evidence is being used for.
- Evidence from a learner's past experience could include: previous education, home or family life, non-certificated education or learning, paid work, community or voluntary work.

Stage 3: Assessing and documenting evidence

- Tell your Standards Verifier (SV) / External Verifier (EV) / External Quality Assurance (EQA) before any monitoring activity starts, if you have applied RPL for any particular units or learners. Your SV / EV / EQA may include these in their sample.
- A learner's past achievement that would show evidence of current knowledge, understanding and skills varies between industries. It depends on the range of their experience, technological changes and the nature of the outcome claimed. The Assessor may ask questions or ask a learner to show them skills, to check that their understanding and skills are current.
- The assessment strategy, where stated, for each qualification must also be followed.

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- Assessment as part of RPL is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgements about a learner’s past learning and experience in relation to unit standards. The Assessor may look at:
 - Work experience records, validated by managers.
 - Past portfolios of evidence or essays made by the learner.
 - Reports validated as being the learner's own unaided work.
 - Expert witness testimonies.
 - Professional discussions.
 - New assignment briefs or tasks that have been created to fill any gaps in the learner's work.
- SV / EV / EQAs are not required to give feedback on an assignment brief or task if the assessor chooses to set one as part of RPL.
- Evaluate all the evidence using the learning outcomes and assessment criteria from the qualification or unit being claimed. In assessing a unit using RPL the Assessor must be satisfied that the evidence from the learner meets the standard for all of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- If the awarding body have published assessment or grading criteria, the assessor should review the evidence against all the criteria.
- If the assessor finds gaps in the learner’s work through RPL, then they will need to use more assessment methods to create enough evidence to be able to award the learning outcome for the whole unit.

Documenting evidence

- Evidence collected through the RPL process needs to be assessed and verified through the same quality assurance procedures that your centre uses for any other internal assessment methods.
- Ensure records of assessment against prior learning are kept and are available for verification if requested.

Stage 4: Outcomes of the RPL process

- Once the programme team has checked a learner's evidence and made an assessment decision, it is important that feedback is given to the learner including the assessment decision and what options are available to the learner if they have decided not to award the unit or qualification.
- The team should check that the learner understands how they can appeal if they do not agree with the assessment decision via the Group Appeals Process. The Internal Verifier for the course should check the evidence if there is a query from the learner. If a decision cannot be made the team should seek the advice of their Head of Section / Curriculum Manager / Head of School and the Quality Nominee if required.
- The learner may then choose to complain to the awarding body to appeal the decision. If the learner can show that they have met all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria using RPL they will be able to claim for the unit or qualification. If the awarding body identify that not all unit requirements have been met, they may ask the centre to provide more evidence, or ask the learner to complete the standard assessment requirements if they want to achieve the qualification.

Stage 5: Claiming certificates

- Teams can claim certificates once the quality assurance processes have been successfully completed using the standard procedures.
- After certification, the centre must keep the assessment and internal verification records, along with any extra RPL records for the time required by the awarding body (e.g. 3 years for Pearson)

Stage 6: Appeals

- If a learner wants to appeal against a decision made about their assessment, they first need to follow the Group Appeals policy and procedures and then contact the relevant awarding body.

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